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## 1. Should Governors head State universities?

### Introduction

# Governors as Chancellors of State Universities



The role of the Governor as Chancellor of State universities is a subject of intense debate. It is often misconstrued as a post-Independence measure to safeguard universities against political interference. This role has not been assigned to the Governor by the Constitution of India but by State university laws.

### Pre-British Practice

Inherited from British colonial rule, it was designed to restrict university autonomy rather than promote it. In 1857, the British established the first three universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, appointing Governors of the respective presidencies as their ex-officio Chancellors to maintain direct control. As Chancellor, the Governor became the head of the university and was granted powers such as appointing Vice-Chancellors, nominating members to university bodies like the Syndicate, approving delegated legislation under the university law, and presiding over convocations. Unfortunately, this model of "Governor as Chancellor" was adopted wholesale for State universities even after Independence, without reassessing its relevance in a democratic and federal context.

### A politicised office

Initially, from 1947 to 1967, the dominance of the Congress party at both the Centre and State levels ensured that Governors remained ceremonial figures, with Chief Ministers wielding real

power. Consequently, there was little impetus to amend the colonial-era provision of "Governor as Chancellor."

However, the political landscape changed after 1967 when several States were ruled by parties other than the ruling party or coalition at the Centre. Governors increasingly transformed from neutral constitutional functionaries to political instruments of the Central government. This change saw them asserting control over university affairs, which often resulted in clashes with State governments. Efforts to amend university laws for change of Chancellor faced roadblocks, as Governors either delayed approving such amendments or referred them to the President. Only a few States succeeded in getting the amendments passed.

### **Governor and the President**

Despite similar legal frameworks, a stark contrast exists between the Governor's role as Chancellor of State universities and the President's role as Visitor of Central universities. The key difference is the level of consultation and legislative oversight.

The President maintains a cordial relationship with the Centre. He functions through the Ministry of Education and consults with it for appointments of Vice-Chancellors, nomination of members to university bodies, and approval of 'statutes' (a type of delegated legislation under the university law). Central university laws require the statutes, along with other types of delegated legislation called 'ordinances' and 'regulations', to be laid before the Parliament. In contrast, the Governor acts unilaterally while performing similar functions for State universities, often bypassing the State's Ministry of Higher Education entirely, particularly in Opposition-ruled States. State University laws do not mandate laying delegated legislation — statutes, ordinances, and regulations — before the Legislature. This is a significant flaw rooted in the continuation of colonial-era practices.

### **Existing challenges**

The persistence of the "Governor as Chancellor" model has caused numerous problems in the governance of State universities.

While State governments fund these universities, Governors wield substantial power without corresponding accountability. This creates a dual authority system, forcing university leadership to serve two masters, often with conflicting demands.

Disagreements between Governors and State governments, particularly in Opposition-ruled States, lead to delays in appointing Vice-Chancellors, causing administrative paralysis. These delays affect areas such as the appointment of staff, the implementation of projects, and even the awarding of degrees.

Many Governors lack the academic qualifications or experience necessary to effectively guide educational institutions. They tend to rely on limited, non-transparent advice, leading to questionable decisions.

Rather than insulating universities from politics, some Governors exacerbate political interference, often prioritising the Centre's political agenda over the universities' autonomy and interests.

Allowing Governors — appointed by the Centre — to control State institutions compromises the principle of federalism. State universities should be fully accountable to elected State governments.

### Alternative Models

Governor as Ceremonial Chancellor: Removes discretionary powers, requiring advice from the State Council of Ministers. Adopted by Gujarat, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.

State-Appointed Chancellor: States appoint eminent academics or public figures as Chancellors. Implemented by Telangana; proposed by Kerala.

University-Elected Chancellor: University bodies or alumni elect the Chancellor (e.g., Oxford, Cambridge).

University-Executive-Appointed Chancellor: The Executive Council appoints the Chancellor (e.g., Birmingham, McGill).

The State-Appointed Chancellor model is the most practical for India, as suggested by the M.M. Punchhi Commission on Centre-State Relations.

### Dismantling a Colonial Legacy

Key Principles: Reforms must prioritize accountability to State governments, minimize political interference, promote institutional self-governance, and foster academic freedom.

Current Status: Some States, like Gujarat and Telangana, have implemented reforms, while others face delays in Presidential assent for proposed changes.

Call to Action: The Centre should expedite approvals, support reforms, and guide States in adopting global best practices to enable universities to thrive free from political influence.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## 2. Greenland's crystal blue lakes have turned brown

### Introduction

More than 7,500 lakes in western Greenland have turned brown, begun emitting carbon, and suffered a drop in water quality due to extreme weather events that took place in 2022, according to a new study. These lakes, which were once crystal blue, provide drinking water to locals, feature rich biodiversity, and sequester atmospheric carbon.

The study, 'Abrupt transformation of west Greenland lakes following compound climate extremes associated with atmospheric rivers', was published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences last week.

The analysis also revealed that the lakes underwent the transformation at a breakneck speed. Typically, such changes take place over centuries, but in this case, they happened within months after the extreme weather events occurred.



### What happened?

Greenland usually experiences snowfall during the fall season, from late August to late September. However, in 2022, due to warmer temperatures, the snow turned into rain. The heat also caused permafrost — frozen ground that often contains a significant amount of organic carbon — to thaw, leading to the release of carbon, iron, magnesium, and other elements. As the record level of rain poured on the region, these elements were washed into the lakes, resulting in their transformation.

According to the study, the increase in temperatures and precipitation was driven by several atmospheric rivers. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) defines atmospheric rivers as: “Relatively long, narrow regions in the atmosphere — like rivers in the sky — that transport most of the water vapour outside of the tropics”.

Although these “rivers in the sky” bring much-needed precipitation and contribute to annual freshwater supplies, strong atmospheric rivers can lead to disastrous flooding and bring in heat. Studies have shown that with rising global temperatures, atmospheric rivers are expected to become more intense — they will be significantly longer and wider than the ones we observe today, according to a 2018 study by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

### What was the impact?

As organic carbon and other elements washed into the lakes, their physical, chemical, and biological properties changed. The study said that the impact of the 2022 extreme weather events was visible by July 2023, meaning the lakes’ colour, odour, and taste had dramatically altered.



As a result, the water quality of these lakes was adversely affected.

Besides, the colour change also meant that less sunlight was able to penetrate the lakes, which, in turn, impacted the phytoplankton living in the water. Phytoplankton consume carbon dioxide on a scale equivalent to forests and other land plants through photosynthesis. However, reduced light in the lakes hindered this process, reducing the absorption of carbon dioxide. Meanwhile, the breakdown of organic matter by other organisms in the lakes increased.

This transformed the lakes from carbon sinks into significant sources of carbon dioxide, with emissions rising by 350%, according to the study.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

Source: Indian Express

### 3. Paris AI summit, where PM Modi is co-chair

#### Introduction



How to leverage the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) while mitigating its risks: that seems to be the biggest challenge confronting policymakers across countries on the issue of AI regulation.

Amid growing concerns over how to develop regulatory oversight of artificial intelligence, without stifling the AI ecosystem, global leaders are set to gather in Paris on February 10 for a two-day AI Action Summit. This builds on a AI Safety Summit held in Britain in Bletchley Park in 2023 and a smaller meeting in Seoul in 2024.

While the Bletchley summit was focused on the debate surrounding the 'doomsday' concerns posed by AI, and eventually resulted in all 25 states, including the US and China, signing the Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety, the Seoul summit last May saw 16 top AI companies making voluntary commitments to develop AI in a transparent manner.

#### Paris AI Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to co-chair the Paris Summit and has accepted the invitation to travel to France.

The Paris summit aims to address the increasing concentration of power in the AI market, especially with respect to the foundational models being owned by a few companies — Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon and Meta.

The Summit will kick off in the Grand Palais on February 10, starting with a forum bringing together multiple stakeholders from around the world – representatives of governments,

businesses and civil society, researchers, artists and journalists. This will involve conferences, round tables and presentations, focused largely on solutions offered by artificial intelligence. The **Summit of Heads of State and Government** will then **take place** on February 11, at the Grand Palais. The idea is to discuss the key common actions to take on AI.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

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